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AUTHOR Woidislawsky, Rita; And Others
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ABSTRACT

As part of a program in which father-adolescent interactions are videotaped in a search for the determinants of achieving behavior, a sample of 37 father-adolescent pairs were studied as the two worked together while the blindfolded adolescent built a tower of irregularly shaped blocks. Discriminant function treatment of coded analysis of verbal and non-verbal behavior showed significant sex differences in both Israeli subjects and a comparison group of Americans. Two-way ANOVAS carried out with the variables which discriminated fathers' behavior to sons and daughters showed that, on the whole, Israeli fathers were close and collegial with their daughters, distant and uninvolved with their sons. This contrasts with American fathers, who show the reverse. The findings are interpreted in light of current social phenomena in Israel. (Author)

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Israeli-American Comparison in Videotaped Interaction between Fathers and Adolescent Boys and Girls[1]

Rita Woidislawsky, Dorothy M. Riley, and Bernard Mausner

Beaver College

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Abstract

As part of a program in which father-adolescent interactions are videotaped in a search for the determinants of achieving behavior, a sample of 37 father-adolescent pairs were studied as the two worked together while the blindfolded adolescent built a tower of irregularly shaped blocks. Discriminant function treatment of coded analysis of verbal and non-verbal behavior showed significant sex differences in both Israeli subjects and a comparison group of Americans. Two-way ANOVAS carried out with the variables which discriminated fathers' behavior to sons and daughters showed that, on the whole, Israeli fathers were close and collegial with their daughters, distant and uninvolved with their sons. This contrasts with American fathers, who show the reverse. The findings are interpreted in light of current social phenomena in Israel.

This study is a part of a program of research into the antecedents of achieving behavior which uses analysis of videotaped interactions between fathers and their adolescent children as a technique for identifying factors related to achievement. A major concern is the study of the determinants of avoidance of success among women. In two studies of American families (Mausner, Riley, & Holmes, 1982; Mausner & Riley, 1983) it was found that fathers demonstrated close working relations with sons as the two worked together on the Raven Matrices and on a blindfold block-building task. The fathers were not as close and collegial with daughters, although this difference was reversed for an anagrams task.

The senior author is an Israeli by birth and has many family contacts in the kibbutz movement. She had previously replicated a part of the Mausner and Riley study using block-building, with an urban sample in Israel. In this the subjects were observed directly by pairs of observers rather than videotaped (Woidislawsky, Tapper, Riley & Mausner, 1983). She found that Israeli fathers used more reinforcement, praise and criticism than American fathers. The fathers of Israeli girls gave reinforcement and praise, whereas the fathers of Israeli boys gave more criticism than American fathers. Since there are some important differences in child rearing practices between the urban and the kibbutz settings in Israel, she proposed videotaping a sample of father-adolescent pairs in kibbutzim for

comparison with the American sample. Unfortunately, due to differences in technique (i.e. lack of videotaping) no comparison with the urban Israeli sample could be carried out.

It is well known that children in the kibbutz live apart from their families. However, they visit back and forth a great deal, and the collaboration among parent, metapelet (child care worker) and teachers is close (Devereaux, Shouval, Bronfenbrenner, Rodgers, et al., 1978). Parents are very warm and affectionate with children, kissing and touching them frequently. The fact that the few hours parents and children spend together are special means that there are few quarrels, and that there is little confrontation or punishment. Fathers and mothers seem to play similar roles (Talmon, 1970).

The attempt to erase traditional differences in sex roles characteristic of Jewish communities in Eastern Europe in the early days of the kibbutz movement has almost ceased. Women today tend to focus on the care of children, on clerical work and housekeeping tasks, even in the most radical kibbutzin (Mednick, 1975; Katz, 1977; Goodhill, 1981). As a result, it was expected that the kibbutz sample would show the same trends as that from the United States. That is, it was expected that fathers would show close working relations with boys, since Israel is notoriously a highly achievement oriented society, and the small

minority of kibbutz members are an elite. And it was felt that fathers would fail to show such good working relations with their daughters.

Method

Subjects

The subjects were 37 kibbutz high school sophomores and their fathers. There were 17 boys and 20 girls, all from intact families.

Apparatus

The equipment consisted of a Panasonic portable color video cassette recorder and camera, and an electrovoice microphone. Thirty-six irregularly shaped blocks were used for the task. A timer was used to time both tasks.

Procedure

Letters were sent to several of the kibbutzim during the month of November, 1982, in order to inform them of the nature of the study. During the month of January, 1983, the experimenters made telephone and personal contacts to set up appointments in which the child and the father would be available for participation. The 37 subjects were tested in eight different kibbutzim.

A table was found, usually in the dining area, on which the tasks could be carried out. The father and child were positioned so that lighting from lamps or windows would fall frontally on the pair and on the table. The camera was set unobstrusively in the corner of the room, and lighting and sound levels were tested (Mausner,

Riley and Holmes, 1982).

The tasks involved the child building a tower, using 36 irregularly shaped blocks. Before proceeding with the task, the adolescent was blindfolded. The father was instructed that he could help his son/daughter in any way he wished. For the first task, the tower had to be built on a 4" X 4" square base. The second task consisted of building a tower with the same blocks, using a narrow block as a base. This time, the child was instructed to use only one hand while still blindfolded. Five minutes were allotted for each of the tasks.

The videotapes were coded by two observers. Eight of the tapes were coded for intercoder reliability. The average agreement was 86%. Two coding systems were used; one dealt with verbal and one with non-verbal behavior of father and child. Parental control behaviors that were assessed included: physical help, verbal directions, or suggestions. Parental positive reinforcement behaviors included: positive feedback, praising child, praising approach to task, praising placement of blocks, and encouragement. Negative reinforcement behaviors included: criticism of approach to task, and criticism of person. Other coded behaviors were warning that block may fall, questions, reasoning or strategy, father's offer to help, and child's refusal of help. For non-verbal behaviors, the experimenter coded the number of blocks the child chose and placed himself, moving blocks after placement.

touching tower and removing blocks. Anxiety, tension, boredom and smiling behaviors were reported. At the end of the visit, the experimenter debriefed the subjects as to the nature of the study. Each child was offered $5.00 for participation.

Results

Discriminant function analysis (Table 1) indicates that of 36 variables used to code the Israeli fathers' behavior, seven discriminated significantly at the .05 level between the behavior of fathers towards sons and daughters. Fathers of Israeli girls showed

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Insert Table 1 about here
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twice as many instances of reasoning behavior as fathers of boys. Fathers of girls also directed them in touching and feeling the blocks, gave more general directions and suggestions, showed anxiety twice as often, touched the tower and helped build it. Fathers of boys gave directions for building, looked away from the task more often than fathers of girls. Table 1 also gives the discriminant functions for the American father-adolescent pairs used in the comparisons (Mausner & Riley, 1983).

The variables found significant in comparing fathers' behavior towards boys and girls in Israel were used in two-way ANOVAS in which one comparison was for the adolescent's sex, the other for the country. Table 2 shows that of the seven variables three show significant interaction effects, one is not significant, but the

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Insert Table 2 about here
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means show a cross-over. In general, Israeli fathers treat girls in the way that American fathers tend to treat boys. That is they are involved in the task with their girls, and relate warmly to them. Neither is found for fathers of boys. In contrast, American fathers are distant from their girls in the way that Israeli fathers are with boys.

Unfortunately no data describing measures of achievement were obtained, and so the differences described above cannot be related to actual indices of achievement.

Discussion

The findings, although significant, are both unexpected and somewhat counterintuitive. The fact that Israeli fathers tended to withdraw from their boys, were warm, involved and somewhat anxious about their girls' performance was certainly not consonant with the hypotheses proposed before the study. One can only speculate, using information about Israeli culture, as to possible reasons for the finding (assuming, of course, that it does not represent artifact).

As was noted above (Talmon, 1970) the modal behavior of Israeli fathers is warm and close; the kind of Anglo-Saxon reserve which keeps fathers from touching their children, especially their daughters, is certainly not evident in Israeli families. Thus the difference in closeness between Israeli and American fathers in relation to their daughters is not unexpected. Why was this not observed among fathers of boys? It may be that the fifteen-year-old

boy on a kibbutz is very much an adult. He is only two years from military service, has his major orientation towards his peers rather than his family, does not look to his father for guidance in the way American boys of the same age do. Clearly, the explanation proposed here, while it is consonant with well-known trends in Israeli society, will have to be tested directly in future research.

A final problem presents itself. If fathers in the kibbutz are as warm and involved in their daughters' performance on a challenging task as the current data suggest, why are these same daughters withdrawing from full participation in the technical, professional and civic life of their communities? Why the retreat to the nursery and the kitchen? Are drives to achievement being stimulated in the family, but depressed by pressures from peers and other role models? The need for further study is apparent.

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Table 1

Stepwise Discriminant Analyses of Father Behavior in America & Israel

	American[a]		Israeli[b]	
Step	Variable	Discriminant Function	Variable	Discriminant Function
1	Questions	-.54	Reasons	.75
2	Smiles	.39	D/S[c] child feel block	.73
3	D/S[c] child move block	.66	D/S[c] child move block	.69
4	Touches	-.31	D/S[c] child touch block	-.74
5	Gives other directions	-.42	Anxious	.39
6	Interrupts	.34	Eyes off task	.78
7	Builds tower	-.30	Touches block	-.65
8	Laughs	.27		
9	Tense	.24		

Classification Table

		Predicted Group Membership	
Actual Group	Number of cases	Boys	Girls
American Boys	50	35 (70%)	15 (30%)
American Girls	50	13 (26%)	37 (74%)
Israeli Boys	17	13 (76%)	4 (24%)
Israeli Girls	20	6 (30%)	14 (70%)

*$p < .05$

[a]29 variables

[b]36 variables

[c]Directs/Suggests

Table 2

Analyses of Variance of American and Israeli Father Behavior

Father	American				Israeli				ANOVA		
	Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls				
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F (culture)	F (sex)	F (int.)
Directs & suggests:											
Child feel block	1.26	1.79	1.10	1.79	.29	.68	1.00	1.55	3.32*	.05	5.67*
Child move block	5.90	8.10	8.60	10.90	3.00	3.60	7.10	8.30	16.37***	5.41*	.31
Child touch block	3.28	3.00	3.74	2.66	2.10	2.20	1.55	2.10	5.47**	.15	.48
Reasoning	18.30	11.28	16.70	10.20	10.71	6.39	20.45	19.30	5.99*	.47	3.59*
Anxious	1.10	1.30	1.00	1.30	.17	.70	.40	.80	5.60**	.00	.25
Eyes off task	.50	1.40	.68	1.80	1.64	2.47	.50	.90	1.12	.00	2.26
Touches block	1.64	3.49	.78	2.38	2.70	2.66	5.00	5.43	10.55***	.00	2.86*
Builds tower	2.10	2.50	.38	1.80	3.82	3.47	7.95	1.28	4.5**	.001	1.60

*$p < .05$

**$p < .01$

***$p < .001$